

## Vote-By-Mail Patterns Indicate Northern California Voters Participate in Elections in Higher Numbers than Southern California Voters

Since California law was changed to allow voters to register as permanent, vote-by-mail (VBM) voters, the vote-by-mail option has become increasingly popular. In recent presidential elections, mail-in ballots cast in California increased from 24.5 percent of total ballots cast in 2000 to 32.6 percent in 2004. In the 2008 presidential election, 42 percent of California voters chose to mail in their ballots.

For traditionally low-turnout election days, vote-by-mail balloting is having an even greater impact, as there is a very high rate of return of ballots by voters who vote by mail. In a special election held a few short weeks after the 2010 June Primary to fill a vacancy in the Senate created when Senator Abel Maldonado was appointed Lieutenant Governor, 77.5 percent of the votes cast were by mail.

According to California Secretary of State information, Bay Area counties report a much larger percentage of permanent vote-by-mail voters than Southern California counties.

The tables below show the disparity as of 2010.

<b>SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA COUNTIES</b>	<b>Permanent VBM %</b>
Los Angeles County	15%
Orange County	38%
Riverside County	39%
San Bernardino County	36%
San Diego County	46%
<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>34.8%</b>

<b>BAY AREA COUNTIES</b>	<b>Permanent VBM %</b>
Alameda County	48%
Contra Costa County	44%
Marin County	58%
San Francisco County	41%
Santa Clara County	67%
<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>51.6%</b>

\*source: [www.politicaldata.com](http://www.politicaldata.com)

While vote-by-mail tallies ranged from 60 percent or higher in most Northern California counties for the 2010 June Primary, in Los Angeles County, only 36 percent of voters voted by mail.

The tables below show the percentage of vote-by-mail ballots cast per all votes cast in various California counties during this past 2010 June Primary election.

<b>SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA COUNTIES</b>	<b>% of VBM Ballots Cast in June Primary Election</b>
Los Angeles County	36%
Orange County	61%
Riverside County	55%
San Bernardino County	54%
San Diego County	65%
<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>54.2%</b>

<b>BAY AREA COUNTIES</b>	<b>% of VBM Ballots Cast in June Primary Election</b>
Alameda County	66%
Contra Costa County	63%
Marin County	65%
San Francisco County	59%
Santa Clara County	75%
<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>65.6%</b>

\*source: <http://www.sos.ca.gov/elections>

In addition to realizing higher voter participation, counties with higher percentages of permanent vote-by-mail voters are also saving money by reducing election-day staff costs, minimizing the logistical problems of equipment shortages and failure, shortening long lines and eliminating the consequences of poorly trained poll workers.

Some raise concerns that voting by mail could skew election results by increasing turnout only among certain demographics. Specifically, they argue that ethnic minorities, who may face language barriers or move frequently, may be less represented if more voters overall are voting by mail.

Interestingly, data gathered by Common Cause, a national, nonpartisan advocacy organization devoted to the political process, suggest that when Latino voters receive ballots in the mail, they seem to fill them out and return them at rates that demonstrate higher participation than when they cast votes at in-person polling places.

Local initiatives that increase permanent vote-by-mail voters should be encouraged. Southern California needs to increase vote-by-mail balloting to leverage its population advantage in statewide elections.